

of last year. They said: Well, first, we are going to wait and see how the State decides to spend their \$4 billion because we don't want to spend on something and have the State spend on the same thing. So we are going to let the State, the Governor, Governor Northam, the General Assembly program the \$4 billion. But while the State is doing that, we are going to go out and dialogue with our citizens.

And I really applaud my local governments. Recognizing this was one-time money that wouldn't happen every year, they had intense public dialogue with local constituents about what can we do to really transform? How can we use this money? And they have done it in fascinating ways.

As I traveled around the State and talked to these local governments, I see them advancing long-delayed capital projects, water and wastewater upgrades, closing the digital divide by investing in broadband, constructing community centers in parts of the community that haven't received investments in the past.

Many gave hazard pay to first responders. The American Rescue Plan helped people fund police, ambulance, fire, mental health workers, public health workers, grants to local nonprofits and churches that supported the community during COVID, grants to shore up Virginia's hard-hit businesses that were engaged in the tourism industry as people stopped traveling. This is what our local governments have done with these dollars.

The investments are supplemented by more than three and a half billion additional dollars to Virginia childcare providers, K-12 school systems, colleges, community colleges, with billions more for other local priorities like transit and broadband infrastructure.

So it was heartening to talk to these county officials. And there are more red counties in Virginia than there are blue counties, so I was talking to county officials from all over the State, and more would have been in Republican counties than Democratic counties. But they were thrilled that Congress—that the Senate by a one-vote margin, as we all remember—passed the American Rescue Plan to invest in these key local priorities.

BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

Mr. President, on the bipartisan infrastructure bill, I told them: I am going to leave this floor and race to Washington and hope that there aren't any State troopers nearby because I need to get to Washington to go to the signing at the White House of the infrastructure bill.

This is the Nation's biggest commitment to infrastructure since the Interstate Highway System initiative in the Eisenhower administration. It will employ hundreds of thousands of people and raise the platform for economic success for decades.

The Presiding Officer was in local government just like I was, and if you

are in local government, you care about infrastructure. When I was a mayor, I had a transit system, I had roads, I had bike trails, I had an airport, I had an Amtrak station, and I had a port on the James River, which is connected to the Chesapeake Bay. There is a lot of oceangoing and freight going out of our port. I had all of that. If you are in local government, you care about infrastructure. That is why it was exciting to see so many mayors and local officials at the White House yesterday when the bill was being signed.

I was proud to cheer on my colleagues who worked on that bill, and I thank all of them. I am especially proud that a provision that I had with Senator WICKER, of Mississippi—to enable our historically Black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions to be involved in training the workforce and creating the innovations that we will need to make this infrastructure investment—was included in the bill.

I want to give a special thanks to my Virginia colleague, MARK WARNER, who, I think, was sort of an unsung hero in the negotiations around the infrastructure bill.

The impact of the bill is going to be felt in Virginia for generations: billions for roads and bridges, ports and dredging, airports, rail to trails, railroad, climate resiliency, broadband, energy grid modernization, waste and wastewater infrastructure. The infrastructure bill contains a significant investment for Chesapeake Bay clean-up—that really matters to us—and a significant investment in the Appalachian Regional Commission. That really matters to southern and western Virginia, the parts of our State that are in Appalachia.

Allocating these dollars to States in smart ways will allow them to prioritize the use of the funds in our cities, counties, and towns in a way that will ensure that each State gets to tackle the most important priorities, because the Virginia solution wouldn't be the California solution or the New Hampshire solution. Every State can use these funds to fund the projects that are the most important there. Virginia is going to receive a minimum of \$100 million for affordable broadband, at least \$7.6 billion for roads and bridges, and at least \$2.7 billion for transit, among other sizable investments.

As I explained this to my Virginia Association of Counties yesterday morning, they were overjoyed because they all had—and the Presiding Officer remembers this—their local capital improvement projects lists, with projects that had been bumping along for years, and there were never enough dollars to really advance them. Now the dollars will be there to get the projects done and cross them off the lists.

BUILD BACK BETTER AGENDA

Mr. President, I want to now talk about the third bill. The administra-

tion calls this bill the Build Back Better bill, and some call it the reconciliation bill because of the Senate budget procedure that we are using to pass it. As a member of the Budget and the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committees, I call it the education and workforce bill. This bill, to me, is fundamentally about preparing America's workers for tomorrow and making sure that our workforce has the training and the childcare and the housing and the healthcare to outcompete any country in the world.

If we want to make good on the promise of the infrastructure bill, who is going to build it? We just signed an infrastructure bill, but it didn't have the training and the education component. Who is going to build this? We have to have a workforce to build this massive infrastructure improvement, a once-in-a-generation improvement. That is what the Build Back Better bill is about.

We are not going to outcompete China just by diplomacy or tariffs or tough talk. We aren't going to outcompete China just by growing our military budget. The best way to outcompete China is to invest in America's workers.

The success of America's economy in the next 50 years will depend on our making the same investments that allowed us to thrive in the 20th century—investing in infrastructure, investing in people—and that is the basis of Build Back Better.

This education and workforce bill also provides sizable investments in community colleges to train workers for infrastructure jobs, to train the next generation of K-12 teachers, and to train workers to enable America to lead the world into a new and innovative energy economy. There will be investments in rural economic development, a Pell grant increase, an extension of the child tax credit, and additional healthcare and housing funds to reduce costs for American families. The bill will close the Medicaid coverage gap, lower healthcare costs and the costs of prescription drugs, and will fund better public health infrastructure.

The thing about this bill that maybe excites me the most is this: We will be able to provide funding for States to make prekindergarten universally available for every 3- and 4-year-old in this country, and we will do it through a mixed delivery model that supports high-quality public and private providers. This will help an additional 140,000 3- and 4-year-olds in Virginia have pre-K, and we will also fund childcare for the kids younger than 3 years old to bring down costs of childcare for working families. When you combine both the pre-K and the childcare support in Virginia, it will mean that 500,000 more kids just in my State will have access to quality and affordable childcare and early education. When kids get a strong start, it